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U.S. Bill Would Require Labels to Warn of Choking

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By Maggie Fox, Health and Science Correspondent

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Joan Stavros Adler thought she was doing the right thing when she sliced her son's hot-dog into coin-sized pieces.

But 4-year-old Eric choked on a slice and died in front of her.

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Adler did not know that a safer way to serve hot dogs to children under 5 is to slice the entire hot dog lengthwise into quarters, and then cut off individual bites. She spoke on Thursday in support of a bill aimed at making food manufacturers label products with such instructions.

"There are no universal warnings of the risks presented by certain foods such as hot dogs, grapes, peanuts, and popcorn -- foods routinely given to children, but shown to be risky for them," Adler told a news conference.

Two House of Representatives members, California Democrat Mike Honda and New Jersey Republican Mike Ferguson, introduced a bill intended to make the Food and Drug Administration

([news](#) - [web sites](#)) investigate unusual food choking incidents.

"While we have a great system in place to warn parents of choking hazards posed by toys, the FDA's oversight of food choking hazards is ineffective," Honda said.

According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) statistics, one U.S. child dies from choking on food every five days and more than 10,000 children are taken to hospital emergency rooms for food choking injuries every year.

Bruce Silverglade, director of legal affairs for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a nonprofit group that campaigns on food issues, said parents were often surprised to learn that a single kernel of popcorn can choke a child.

"They can eat it 10 times and it's kind of like Russian roulette," he said. "Popcorn is particularly dangerous because it can swell up in the throat."

Adler said she even asked her pediatrician about hot dogs and was told they posed no special risk to her son.

"I took special precautions during Eric's short life to protect him from what I considered the dangers of life -- holding his hand in a parking lot, locking the gate of the swimming pool, reading toy labels to make sure they were appropriate for his age," she said.

"I am an educated person but I never realized how dangerous a hot dog could be."

But children under 5 do not have all their teeth to chew food up thoroughly and have immature airways that are easily blocked, doctors said.

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